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ABSTRACT

A list of grievances comprises the longest portion of the Declaration of Independence, but the source of the document's power is its firm philosophic foundation. In this unit, the teacher can capitalize on the propensity to complain to increase student awareness of the precedents behind the Declaration of Independence. The unit can help students see the development of the Declaration as both an historical process and a writing process through role play, creative writing, an introduction to some important documents, and a review of historic events. The lesson plan contains a guiding question and material on how to prepare to teach the lesson. It also contains suggested activities for the following lessons: Lesson 1: Complaints, Complaints...; Lesson 2: So, What Are You Going To Do about It?; Lesson 3: The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America; Lesson 4: When, in the Course of Human Events...; Lesson 5: What Experience Hath Shown; Lesson 6: Share and Declare; Lesson 7: Eighty-Six It: Changes to Jefferson's Draft; Lesson 8: Publish and Declare; and Extending the Lesson. The lesson plan provides detailed information and ideas for teaching each lesson; cites learning objectives; gives appropriate grade levels and approximate length of time required for each lesson; and outlines national standards for civics and government, social studies, and language arts covered in the lessons. Contains extensive lists of relevant Web sites and additional resources. (NKA)

ED 455 517

Declare the Causes: The Declaration of Independence—Understanding Its Structure and Origin

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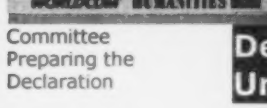

Declare the Causes: The Declaration of Independence Understanding Its Structure and Origin

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DISCLAIMER

Introduction

Complaints! Complaints!

Students have been known to complain at times. (So have their teachers.) Even the Founding Fathers of our country indulged in gripe sessions. In fact, a list of grievances comprises the longest section of the Declaration of Independence; however, the source of the document's power is its firm philosophic foundation.

You can capitalize on the propensity to complain to increase student awareness of the precedents behind the Declaration of Independence. Help your students see the development of the Declaration as both an historical process and a writing process through role play, creative writing, an introduction to some important documents and a review of historic events.

Guiding Question: What precedents exist for specific elements in the Declaration of Independence, both in previous documents and in historical events? How is the Declaration structured?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Describe and list the sections of the Declaration of Independence and explain the basic purpose of each.
- Give an example of a document that served as a precedent for the Declaration.
- List and explain one or more of the colonists' complaints included in the Declaration.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the Declaration of Independence as a historical process developed in protest of unfair conditions.

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

SUBJECT AREAS

History/U.S.: Colonial

History/U.S.: Civics and U.S. Government

History/World: Human rights

Literature and Language Arts: Essay

GRADE LEVELS

5-8

TIME REQUIRED

One to two class periods for each of eight lessons.

SKILLS

- primary document analysis
- critical thinking
- writing process
- collaboration
- comparison and contrast
- information gathering

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

National Standards for Civics and Government

I. What is Government and What Should It Do? (more)

B. Where do people in government get the authority to make,

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Background

Opponents of the Stamp Act of 1765 declared that the act — which was designed to raise money to support the British army stationed in America after 1763 by requiring Americans to buy stamps for newspapers, legal documents, mortgages, liquor licenses, even playing cards and almanacs — was illegal and unjust because it taxed Americans without their consent. In protesting the act, they cited the following prohibition against taxation without consent:

> *No scutage [tax] ... shall be imposed..., unless by common counsel...*

The source? The Magna Carta, written in 1215, 550 years earlier.

American resistance forced the British Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act in 1766. In the succeeding years, similar taxes were levied by British Parliament and protested by many Americans. The American Revolution brewed in a context of Americans' concern over contemporary events as well as awareness of historic precedents. Mindful of both, the framers created the Declaration of Independence, adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, in which the colonies declared their freedom from British rule.

What To Do

Review the lesson plans. Bookmark or download and print out any materials you will use. Make copies of a transcript of the Declaration for every student.

You may wish to provide students with a copy of the Written Document Analysis Worksheet, available through EDSITEment at The Digital Classroom, to guide them as they review primary source documents.

Suggested Activities

Lesson 1: Complaints, Complaints...
Lesson 2: So, What are You Going to Do About It?
Lesson 3: The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America
Lesson 4: When, in the Course of Human Events...
Lesson 5: What Experience Hath Shown
Lesson 6: Share and Declare
Lesson 7: Eighty-Six It: Changes to Jefferson's Draft
Lesson 8: Publish and Declare
Extending the Lesson

LESSON 1

Complaints, Complaints...

Discuss with students that you have overheard them, at times, make various complaints about the treatment of young people. Complaints not unlike those motivated the Founding Fathers at the time of the American Revolution.

Give the students a short time — in small groups — to list complaints they have about the treatment of young people. The complaints should be of a

apply, and enforce rules and laws and manage disputes about them? (more)
II. What are the Basic Values and Principles of American Democracy? (more)
A. What are the most important values and principles of American democracy? (more)
B. What are some important beliefs Americans have about themselves and their government? (more)
V. What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy? (more)
C. What are important rights in the United States? (more)

National Council for the Social Studies

2. Time, Continuity, and Change (more)
6. Power, Authority and Governance (more)
10. Civic Ideals and Practices (more)

NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world. (more)
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. (more)
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). (more)

View your state's standards

general nature (for example: recess should be longer, fourth graders should be able to see PG videos, etc.). Collect the list. Choose complaints to share with the class, so you can guide the discussion to follow. Save the lists for future reference.

There are moments when all of us are more eager to express what's wrong than we are to think critically about the problem and possible solutions. There is no reason to think people were any different in 1776. It's important to understand the complaints of the colonists as one step in a process involving careful deliberation and attempts to redress grievances.

Ask questions to help your students consider their concerns in a deliberate way. WHO makes the rules they don't like, WHO decides if they are fair or not, HOW does one get them changed, WHAT does it mean to be independent from the rules, and finally, HOW does a group of people declare that they will no longer follow the rules?

LESSON 2

So, What are You Going to Do About It?

Ask the students to imagine that, in hopes of effecting some changes, they are going to compose a document based on their complaints to be sent to the appropriate audience. As they begin to compose their document, they should consider the following questions. (**Note to the teacher:** The following questions correspond to the sections of the Declaration, as noted in parentheses, which will be discussed later. This discussion serves as a prewriting activity for the writing assignment.)

- To whom would you send your complaints? Why? What reasons would you give for your decision to write out your complaints? (Preamble)
- What makes you think your complaints are worthwhile? Aren't there good reasons why things are the way they are? Why should things as they are be changed? Would it be possible to summarize the thinking behind your desire for change in a single sentence? (statement of beliefs, or the thinking behind the complaints)
- Is there anything in particular the reader should notice about your complaints? Is there anything you need to keep in mind to make sure your audience understands and appreciates your complaints? What kinds of events inspired your complaints? (the list of complaints)
- Have you already tried to make any changes in the treatment of young people? In what way? (prior attempts to redress grievances)
- Is it possible to say in a single sentence what it is you really want to happen? It would take time to change the system to accommodate all of your complaints. What should happen right away? (declaration of independence)
- Who would be willing to sign his/her name to this list of complaints even if it were going to be seen and read by many people? (the signatures)

LESSON 3

The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America

The Declaration of Independence was created in an atmosphere of complaints about the treatment of the colonies under British rule. In this unit, students will be given the opportunity to compose a document based on their own complaints; however, the resulting "declarations" might be more convincing if based on some models already proven effective.

Provide every student with a transcript of the Declaration. There is no need to do a close reading of the entire document at this point. The immediate goal is to understand the structure of the document and the basic intent of each section. Discuss the Declaration with students, using the following section-by-section questions help students relate this overview of the Declaration to the previous discussion.

- **Preamble:** the reasons for writing down the Declaration (from "WHEN, in the Course of human Events" to "declare the Causes which impel them to the Separation."). What reason(s) did the Founding Fathers give for their decision to write out a declaration?
- **Statement of beliefs:** specifying what the undersigned believed, the philosophy behind the document (from "We hold these Truths to be self-evident" to "an absolute Tyranny over these States"). What beliefs did the Founding Fathers declare they held?
- **List of complaints:** the offenses that impelled the declaration (from "To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World" to "unfit to be the ruler of a free people"). What are a few of the complaints? Are any specific events mentioned? If not, is the information given sometimes sufficient to figure out to which events the complaints refer?
- **Statement of prior attempts to redress grievances:** (From "Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren," to "Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.") In what way(s) did the framers claim to have already tried in addressing the complaints?
- **Declaration of independence:** (From "WE, therefore" to "and our sacred Honour.") What will change in the colonies as a result of the Declaration?
- **The signatures:** Which signers do students recognize?

LESSON 4

When, in the Course of Human Events...

Working alone or in small groups, students draft their own declarations. The transcript of the Declaration of Independence will serve as a model; student documents should contain the same sections. They should start with their reasons for writing (preamble), as discussed above. Tell students they can model their statement after the Preamble to the Declaration. For example, they can begin with the words "When, in the course of human events...."

LESSON 5

What Experience Hath Shown

After a session of work on their declarations, introduce to students the idea of earlier documents that set a precedent for the Declaration. Let students know that the committee members who drafted our Declaration (John Adams of Massachusetts, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Robert R. Livingston of New York and Thomas Jefferson of

Virginia) were aware of documents from earlier years. Some of these documents served as models as the committee members wrote the Declaration. Perhaps seeing precedents for the Declaration will help students in composing theirs.

Ask students to work in small groups to review some of the earlier documents and find common features between the historical documents and the Declaration. If desired and appropriate for your class, this would be a good time to read the entire Declaration.

Students should look at the historical documents for similar structures (the document has a preamble, for instance) or phrases or passages that relate to the Declaration. As they read the excerpts, students should refer back to their transcript of the Declaration of Independence. Students should not attempt close readings of the documents. Instead, they scan key passages for similarities. (If you wish, you could have students locate documents on their own, using The Avalon Project At The Yale Law School website, accessible through EDSITEment.)

The following documents are available through the EDSITEment resource The Avalon Project At The Yale Law School unless otherwise noted.

1. The Magna Carta (June 1215). Of structural interest is the preamble and the last section (#63). What differences and similarities do the students notice? Section 1 and Section 12 also have relevant content.

   The Digital Classroom offers a digitized copy of the Magna Carta, a translation of a 1297 version, and an analysis, "Magna Carta and Its American Legacy".

2. The First Charter of Virginia (April 10, 1606). A relevant section begins "And we do also ordain, establish, and agree, for Us, our Heirs, and Successors, that each of the said Colonies shall have a Council" and ends "pass under the Privy Seal of our Realm of England;" a statement of the colonists' ability to pass laws.

   Also of interest is the section beginning, "Also we do, for Us, our Heirs, and Successors, DECLARE" to "any other of our said Dominions."

3. The Mayflower Compact (November, 1621).

4. English Bill of Rights (1689) for comparison to the list of grievances (such as quartering troops, a standing army, suspending of laws).

5. The Royal Proclamation (October 7, 1763) issued at the conclusion of the French and Indian War. Look at the section beginning with "for the security of the Liberties and Properties" and ending with "and call General Assemblies."

6. The Resolutions of the Continental Congress, also known as The Stamp Act Congress (October 19, 1765). Especially relevant is the list of complaints (such as the complaint beginning "That the only representatives of the people of these colonies...").

7. The Articles of Association (October 20, 1774). For comparison to the list of grievances, look at the passage from "the present unhappy situation of our affairs is occasioned by a ruinous system of colony administration" to "whenever a wicked ministry shall chuse so to direct them." Students should also look at the statement beginning

"To obtain redress of these grievances."

8. The Virginia Declaration of Rights (June 12, 1776), written by George Mason and accessible from EDSITEment through The Digital Classroom. Especially pertinent are the first three sections.

Guide to Independent Searches for Precedent Setting Documents

The Avalon Project contains many relevant documents and is fully searchable. Students can search for terms such as "rights" or "taxes" or "standing armies" within the Colonial Charters, Grants, and Early Constitution collection listed in the pull-down menu on the search page. Students should be aware that search results will include documents created after 1776, which are irrelevant to the task at hand. The Avalon Project website has amassed a list of documents under the title The American Constitution: A Documentary Record, including forerunners to the United States Constitution. There you may find additional relevant documents. Of special interest are the sections "The Roots of the Constitution" and "Revolution and Independence."

LESSON 6

Share and Declare

Once student groups have analyzed the historical documents that preceded the Declaration of Independence, ask them to share their findings with the rest of the class. In what ways were the earlier documents similar to the Declaration?

You may wish to create a display of the information students have uncovered. For example, on a large bulletin board, center the text of the Declaration. Highlight relevant excerpts. Use a colored strand of yarn to lead from each Declaration excerpt to a posting of the name and date of a related document. Classes with the necessary technology, skill, and computer access can do this same exercise on the computer, creating hyperlinks to the precedents.

Students should continue to work on their declarations, either during class or as a homework assignment. They can use what they learned through the study of relevant documents created before the Declaration as a guide for the information they wish to include in their documents. By this time, students should be working on the statement of beliefs and the complaints section of their declarations.

LESSON 7

Eighty-Six It: Changes to Jefferson's Draft

Now students can look at some drafts of the Declaration. Every class should view actual images of these drafts with corrections written in Jefferson's handwriting. Some classes might benefit from a closer look at the kinds of changes that occurred. The committee and Continental Congress are said to have made a total of 86 changes to the document.

American Memory has a collection of Documents from the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention, 1774-1789, containing many historic documents, including images and transcripts of original copies of various drafts of the Declaration. Students may be especially interested to view an image of a fragment of the Declaration and a transcript of the earliest known draft of the Declaration. You also can access an image and transcript of a later draft of the Declaration.

Reading just a small portion of the later draft will demonstrate the significant changes that took place as the Congress worked on the Declaration. Did the final version improve on the draft? If so, how?

Students should continue to work on their declarations. They should be nearing completion of a first draft, including a statement of prior attempts to redress grievances, and a declaration of independence. Take some time to discuss the writing process within the student groups. How did they proceed? Did they ever go back and make changes? What kinds of changes? Did more than one person have input?

LESSON 8

Publish and Declare

Now, the student groups should complete and present their "declarations." If typed on a computer, these can be printed out in an appropriately ornate font. The paper can be stained using tea to give the appearance of age. Students should sign the document on which they worked.

If students have access to the necessary technology, they can create hyperlinks from sections of their computerized declaration to specific precedents in the Declaration.

Students should now reflect on their experience writing a declaration and the process that created it. What part of their own declaration would they say most resembles the 1776 Declaration of Independence? Which complaint? Which part of their beliefs? What changes did they make in the course of writing their documents? How did the group decide how to proceed? Student declarations should be posted and, if practical, sent to the intended audience (parents, principal).

For a culminating activity, the documents can be read in class in ceremonial fashion. The documents' reflection of the structure of the Declaration will help the teacher assess the success of the activity.

Extending the Lesson

- Have students conduct research into the historical events that led to the colonists' complaints and dissatisfaction with British rule. What were some of the specific complaints? After reviewing the complaints, the students look for specific events related to the grievances listed. They can use their own textbooks and other sources available at school.

  The historical events students choose could also be added to the bulletin board by connecting an excerpt of a particular complaint to a brief, dated summary of an event. The complaints relate to actual events, but the precise events were not discussed in the Declaration. Why do the students think the framers decided to do that? (Someone might notice that, in the fragment of the early draft discussed below, the complaint referred to a specific event.) Would the student declarations also be more effective without specific events tied to the complaints?

- This unit can serve as a model for studying any of our nation's important historical documents. A study of the Constitution could begin with a role-play in which students imagine themselves marooned on a desert island, with little hope of rescue. Working in groups, students should come up with the 10 most important concepts for ensuring harmonious living in the new community and

write them down in a list.

After the initial round of listing, ask some "what if," "what about" and "what would happen" questions to help cover their omissions. Then post the revised lists on the classroom bulletin board or, if you have a computer in your classroom, post them electronically. At this point, you could introduce students to the Constitution, relating the concepts the students have come up with on their own to articles in the Constitution and talking about why a particular tenet is as important now as it was then. You could then compare your "living classroom constitution(s)" with the U.S. Constitution (especially the Bill of Rights) and selections from the Magna Carta, the Mayflower Compact, etc, depending on the age and sophistication level of your students.

The Avalon Project's The American Constitution - A Documentary Record contains many relevant documents for this type of study.

- Students can now look at the American Declaration as a precedent of documents that came after it. A fruitful comparison could be made with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man – 1789, available through the Avalon Project. This declaration is also known as the French Declaration of Independence.

- Students could attempt to conduct a Declaration Convention in which they use the small group declarations as the basis of a single document representing the entire class.

- Volunteers could stage a dramatic reading of the entire Declaration.

- Students may be interested in seeing an image of the original Declaration, now exhibited in the Rotunda of the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, this version has faded badly.

  The most frequently reproduced version of the Declaration is taken from the engraving made by printer William J. Stone in 1823. This image also is available online and has not faded as much as the original Declaration.

Links to EDSITEment Participating Websites

The Digital Classroom
http://www.nara.gov/education/

- Document Analysis Worksheets
  http://www.nara.gov/education/teaching/analysis/analysis.html
- Transcript of the Declaration of Independence
  http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/declaration/declaration.html
- Digitized copy of the Magna Carta
  http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/magnacarta/magmain.html
- Translation of a 1297 version of the Magna Carta
  http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/magnacarta/magtrans.html
- "Magna Carta and Its American Legacy"
  http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/magnacarta/magintrp.html
- The Virginia Declaration of Rights
  http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/billrights/virginia.html
- Image of the original Declaration
  http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/declaration/decorig.jpg
- Engraving of the Declaration made by William J. Stone, 1823
  http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/declaration/decstone.jpg

The Avalon Project at the Yale Law School
http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/magframe.htm

- The Magna Carta
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/magframe.htm
- First Charter of Virginia
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/va01.htm
- The Mayflower Compact
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mayflowr.htm
- English Bill of Rights
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/england.htm
- The Royal Proclamation
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/proc1763.htm
- The Resolutions of the Continental Congress
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/resolu65.htm
- The Articles of Association
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/contcong/10-20-74.htm
- The American Constitution: A Documentary Record
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/constpap.htm
- French Declaration of the Rights of Man – 1789
  http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/rightsof.htm

American Memory
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amhome.html

- Documents from the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention, 1774-1789
  http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/bdsds/bdsdhome.html
- Fragment of the Declaration
  http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/frag1.jpg
- Transcript of the earliest known draft of the Declaration
  http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/frag.html
- Image of a later draft
  http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/draft1.jpg
- Transcript of rough draft of the Declaration
  http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/ruffdrft.html

Presidential Speeches
http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/P/

Additional Resources

- An annotated version of the final draft of the Declaration, with links to an earlier draft and other materials such as Jefferson's letters, is available through EDSITEment at Presidential Speeches.Passages in parentheses in the draft surround items that were crossed out; it is believed that some of those changes were made by John Adams.

- The Continental Congress made important changes to the Declaration in two places. An analysis of these changes is accessible through the EDSITEment resource American Memory at the Library of Congress site.

- If desired, students can refer to Jefferson's recollections of the events in the Continental Congress leading to the Declaration as we know it, including the specific language that was changed before the final draft. Jefferson's online autobiography, available through The Avalon Project, includes a paragraph about one debate over specific words in the document.

Further down, beneath the heading "A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled," is a complete annotated text of the Declaration with changes indicated.

- American Memory's special collection A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation contains an annotated version of the Declaration with notes from Jefferson as to which committee member made specific changes (with which he apparently did not wholeheartedly agree) on pp. 491-502 of volume five of the Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, the record for Friday, June 28, 1776.

Guide To Precedent Setting Documents for The Constitution
Resources available from The Avalon Project at the Yale Law School:

- The Articles of Confederation of the United Colonies of New England (May 19, 1643). A precursor of the Constitution's requirement for a census is found here in Article 4, "that the Commissioners for each Jurisdiction from time to time, as there shall be occasion, bring a true account and number of all their males in every Plantation."

- Ordinances for Virginia July 24-August 3, 1621, including article IV with its discussion of a representative assembly.

- Articles of Confederation

- The Madison Debates, James Madison's notes taken during the Federal Convention of 1787.

Guide to Locating Events Related to the Declaration of Independence
Resources available through American Memory:

- Time Line — America during the Age of Revolution, 1776-1789

- Documents from the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention

- To Form a More Perfect Union, especially the introduction which gives a brief overview of the events leading to the adoption of the Constitution.

- Time Line — America during the Age of Revolution, 1764-1775. Students can use key words from the Declaration such as quartering, taxes, laws, trade, charter and/or legislature to search relevant events using the browser's FIND function under the EDIT menu. The concept here is to establish connections between actual events and the complaints rather than establishing a complete record of events.

- A very useful and kid-friendly link, America's Story, is accessible through the EDSITEment resource American Memory. At the bottom of the page are links to information on a number of events of the period.

Additional Resources For Teachers

- The article "The Declaration of Independence: A History" provides a detailed account of the Declaration, from its drafting through its preservation today at the National Archives.

- "The Stylistic Artistry of the Declaration of Independence" by

Stephen Lucas from Prologue, Spring 1990. By closely examining its language, this perceptive article sheds light on the Declaration as a work of literature and of persuasion.

- A Multitude of Amendments, Alterations and Additions, The Writing and Publicizing of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution of the United States site at the Independence National Historical Park (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) provides a discussion of what happened in Philadelphia during the creation of the United States of America. This site is accessible through the EDSITEment resource The Digital Classroom.